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Foreword, Winter 2011: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

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Since the end of the Cold War 20 years ago, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has sought new roles in the world while facing existential questions about its purposes. The Allies have provided some answers to those questions in the 2010 Strategic Concept and other fundamental policy statements, and the Alliance has enlarged to include twelve new member-states—mostly from the former Warsaw Pact—and has conducted missions in Europe, Africa, and Central Asia. Despite an active military and diplomatic agenda, NATO continues to grapple with foundational questions.

This issue begins with arguments regarding the future of NATO, one from Stanley R. Sloan and another from Julian Lindley-French, both keynote speakers at the workshop on deterrence held in Tallinn, Estonia, in May 2011, and co-sponsored by NATO and the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency. Mr. Sloan argues that the debate about strategic matters neglects a crucial problem facing NATO, namely, perceived gaps in commitment and investment between the United States and the European Allies. Americans often see themselves as paying for the defense of European countries that are unwilling the defend themselves or even help the United States protect its interests. Meanwhile, there is a perception in Europe that the United States is using NATO to pursue its own interests at European expense. Mr. Sloan argues that these viewpoints must be addressed, or they will hinder NATO's pursuit of its political goals. Mr. Lindley-French examines similar questions from another angle. While NATO excels at grand strategy and tactical cooperation in its various missions, it has, he argues, neglected its foundation: the coordination of national defense policies to ensure a cohesive alliance.

Brendan Wilson examines the arguments of American critics who see European countries as "freeloaders" in the Alliance, arguing that while their military budgets may not measure up to US defense spending, they contribute more than their fair share according to their size. In addition, European member states also offer capabilities that complement those of the United States, freeing America to devote its resources elsewhere.

Following the argument of complementary capabilities, Glenn Segell examines how NATO air support contributed to the conduct of the African Union mission in Darfur, and how such cooperation with a regional organization outside Europe established a template for NATO's intervention in Libya. His article provides a rare examination of the Alliance's activities in Africa.

Continuing on the theme of peacekeeping and stability operations, Ivan Ivanov examines how countries aspiring to NATO membership have increased their commitment to international operations as they have deepened their relationships with NATO. However, the aspirations of these countries—and thus their participation in NATO-led operations—are constrained by domestic politics, unresolved disputes with their neighbors, and the willingness of current members to accept them as Allies.

From here, we return to the issue of cooperation between member-states, as Richard Weitz examines some of the formal institutional constraints and opportunities facing the Alliance.

Finally, we look at NATO through the lens of the European Union, an international institution that shares many of its members with NATO. Andreas Winter and David Anderson examine the military provisions of the EU's new Lisbon Treaty and consider whether they complement, duplicate, or conflict with the way member states work with NATO. While there is some potential for redundancy or competition, they find that the EU's new military efforts largely complement its members' commitments to NATO.

Through the course of the seven articles presented in this issue, our authors cover common territory from many directions, providing a multifaceted view of a complex alliance and its role in the world today. The editors hope that readers will see NATO in a new light after reading this issue.